



BRIDGING THE

Digital Divide

People's Computer Resource Center

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Mr. Robert Wolinsky
The Hon. J. Frederick Motz, Judge
U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland
101 W. Lombard Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Re: Microsoft/MDL Settlement
Microsoft I-V Cases J.C.C.P. No. 4106

Dear Judge Motz and Mr. Wolinsky:

The People's Resource Center is a 501c3 charity serving low-income households in DuPage County for 27 years. Our Computer Literacy Training and Access Program is in its fifth year and we have given a computer and training to about 2,000 households. The major obstacle in bridging the digital divide has been Microsoft's refusal to give us permission to put either Windows 95 or Office 97 on computers that we refurbish. Microsoft has donated Windows 95 and Office 2000 software for our training sites – we currently have 8 active sites – but they prohibit the distribution of this software to low-income families. This is a major obstacle.

Rather than discontinue our program we load Linux and StarOffice on the computers that we refurbish, most of which are donated to us with all of the software removed. [It is extremely rare to receive all of the materials that Microsoft says we need to legally load software on refurbished computers: original media and manuals, certificate of authenticity, end user license agreement, and a letter of transfer.] As a result it is difficult to recruit volunteer instructors and support people who are willing to learn and teach Linux and StarOffice. Obviously, it is also a real challenge to our clients who need to learn the Microsoft environment for work skills and school homework while practicing on the non-standard computers.

We would be happy to provide details of our experience to you or anyone that you would suggest who is working on this issue. We think that Microsoft is abusing the use of its copyrights by restricting an entire segment of society to standard computer access. It should be recognized by the courts that Microsoft Windows and Word have become standards for personal computing. Copyrights on such standard software should expire

after four years. Microsoft would lose nothing by this type of expiration and low-income households would have computer access as a donation or at an affordable price.

I realize that it may be too late to introduce this factor into the current settlement process. However, once the proposals for settlement have begun to focus on the digital divide rather than compensation for over-charged computer customers, I think our experience could provide important feedback. Please do not hesitate to call, FAX, or email a response if you think there is anyone who would like more information on this problem or the proposed remedy.

Respectfully submitted,



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